



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

January 27, 2005

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Sen. Byrd:

As you know, four months have passed since the last hurricane hit the State of Florida. Your Committee generously supported \$8.5 billion in emergency aid for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to respond to the disaster and included report language in the FY 2005 Military Construction Appropriations bill directing FEMA "to use its authority to reimburse local governments for debris removal on privately-owned lands upon finding it is necessary to eliminate an immediate threat to life, public health and safety." However, FEMA has failed to reimburse our communities for private debris removal.

While these roads are "private," they do serve a public purpose and the remaining debris poses a true threat to our communities' health and safety. The amount of debris has been insurmountable and so has the cost to our local governments to remove it. Many counties have had to resort to taking out loans because they are still waiting for reimbursements for receipts submitted over four months ago.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that you include in the next available legislative vehicle bill language directing FEMA to make payments to local governments for private road debris removal and require FEMA to report to the committee on the status of our counties' reimbursement requests.

We are eager to work with you to ensure that the congressional directive we provided last year is carried out and that our storm-weary communities are able to finally receive some relief from this problem.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson

Phil Martin